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ABSTRACT

A study investigated: (1) the communication strategies (CSs) used by Turkish learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) when interacting with native English speakers, and (2) the influence of gender on use of CSs when communication difficulties occur because of limited English proficiency. Subjects were ten native Turkish-speaking ESL learners paired with ten native English speakers. Conversations were recorded and transcribed, and CSs were coded. Analysis indicates the CSs used by the ESL learners included reduction strategies, generalization, paraphrase, word coinage, cooperative strategies, repair, and repetition. Results also revealed that gender of the native English speaker had an important effect on use of CSs in both same- and opposite-sex dyads; all Turkish ESL learners used more CSs with female than with male interlocutors. It is concluded that communication success depends on pairing, particularly in native-nonnative interaction where cooperation is required, and on interlocutors' personalities. Implications concerning the teaching of CSs are examined. Contains 20 references. (MSE)

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THE ROLE OF GENDER ON COMMUNICATION STRATEGY USE

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The presentation today will address the issue of strategic competence within the second language acquisition. For a moment, I like to have you think about the days that you learned a second language. In 60s, the traditional way of teaching a language was through audiolingual method or grammar-translation method in which grammar was the main focus. The learner must learn the grammar of the language, but nothing else. However, for the last twenty years, the methods of teaching and learning a second language has shifted towards a more communicative way. Linguists, researchers and teachers are becoming more interested in the study of the learning process than the learning product, in the behaviour of the learners than that of teachers, and in the development of communicative competence than that of grammatical competence. The communicative approach to language teaching has been welcomed and adopted in many parts of the world.

Communicative language teaching aims at improving the learners communicative competence. Communicative competence as a whole can be explained in terms of three component competencies; grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Grammatical competence involves knowledge of the language code which is grammar, rules, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation. Language teaching, as you recall, has traditionally been aimed at developing this competence above all others. Sociolinguistic competence involves two set of rules-sociocultural rules and rules of discourse. Sociocultural rules are the ways of using language appropriately in a given context, and the rules of discourse is the way of combining language structures to produce unified and coherent contexts such as a political speech, an academic lecture. The focus is on cohesion. The other component of communicative competence most neglected by language teachers, researchers and even textbooks and teachers, however, is the strategic competence. This competence involves the mastery of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies which are used by the language learners and even by the native speakers of a language when they face a communication difficulty or breakdown. In other words, strategic competence refers to the ability to get ones meaning across successfully to the interlocutors in an interaction when problems arise in the conversation. Think about yourself; what do you do when you feel that you can not continue to the conversation in a second or foreign language because of the limited knowledge of the language? How

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do you solve the communicative problems? On the other hand, what do the language learners do when they want to say something but find that they do not have the words in their L2? Or what do they do when they do not understand what is said?

Strategic competence is relevant to both L1 and L2, since communication breakdowns occur and must be overcome not only in a foreign language but in one's mother tongue as well. However, since strategic competence involves strategies to be used when communication is difficult, it is of crucial importance for foreign language learners. A lack of strategic competence may account for situations when students with a knowledge of grammar and a wide range of vocabulary get stuck and are unable to carry out the conversation. Therefore, we can develop learners communicative competence by building up their strategic competence, that is, their ability to use communication strategies that allow them to cope with various communicative problems. This is suitable for Turkish students who learn a second language, either English or any language. For one thing, it is an especially useful way to increase learners communicative competence in a monolingual country, such as Turkey, in which L2 is learners through formal classroom settings. For another, it encourages learners to make creative use of the L2 knowledge they already had. This is the ability that Turkish students lack. So, is it practically possible to increase the Turkish EFL learners communicative competence by developing their ability to use communication strategies, and are there any gender differences in the use of these strategies by male and female learners? These are the questions that the present study tries to answer.

Before going any further and talk about my research, it is necessary to define the term CSs. The CSs generally have been defined as devices used by L2 learners when they have problems in L2 communication because their communicative ends have outrun their communicative means. In the last decade, the study of CSs has attracted increasing attention by many researchers such as Tarone (1980), Pica et al. (1991), Wang (1993), Gass and Varonis (1986) or Faerch and Kasper (1983). Consequently, there are various taxonomies and definitions on CSs. However, all these definitions are actually the same, except the terms that are used for the particular strategy. For instance, circumlocution is used by one researcher, and paraphrase is used for another researcher, even though both terms refer to the same strategy of giving example of the word that the learner can not find. Overall, the strategies that are used by the learners at such difficult times can be divided into two main types; reduction and achievement strategies. Other researchers have used different terms for the two

types; message adjustment for the first, and resource expansion strategies for the second.

Therefore, I conducted a study aiming at finding the CSs that the Turkish EFL learners use while interacting with native speakers of English. It also examines the possible impact of gender on the use of CSs when they face communication difficulties because of their limited proficiency in the target language. Specifically, the research questions are as follows:

1-What types of communication strategies do male Turkish EFL learners use when they interact with male native speaker vs. female native speaker of English?
2) What types of communication strategies do female Turkish EFL learners use when they interact with male native speaker vs. female native speaker of English?
3) Are there any similarities and/or differences between male vs. female Turkish EFL learners in the use of communication strategies?

10 Turkish learners of English were paired with 10 native speakers of English to form 20 conversations. The conversations were audiotaped and transcribed. I used Faerch and Kasper's framework in coding the strategies. The strategies that the Turkish EFL learners used are as follows:

1- Reduction strategies : the learners reduce the propositional content of their intended message. This study analyzed topic avoidance, message abandonment, and meaning replacement. The learners change the topic or totally give up.

2- generalization: the learners solve lexical gap problems by using IL items which would not normally be used in such contexts, resulting in the extension of words or phrases to an inappropriate context. Bird for robin

3- paraphrase: the learners reword the messages in an alternate, usually indirect way and usually using characteristic properties or functions of the intended referent. Some people have a car, some people have a bicycle, some have a a cycle there is a motor

4- word coinage: the learner creates new words. e.g., rounding of the stadium. (for the "curve")

5- cooperative strategies: the learners ask for cooperation either by direct appeal or indirect appeal to elicit some assistance or

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validation from the listener. How do you say that? What do you call it?

6- repair: the learners correct their utterances in order to modify the meaning of the messages. Correction of linguistic form is not included.

7- repeat: the learners repeat words, phrases or sentences in order to buy some time to produce the utterances they intend.

About the other research question of whether gender has an impact on the use of these strategies, I found significant and nonsignificant results. So, my findings can be generally stated as follows:

This study investigated the influence of gender on L2 learners' production of Communication Strategies (CSs) while interacting with native speakers of the target language. It examined the impact of gender on the use of CSs when L2 learners faced communication difficulties and/or communication breakdowns due to their limited proficiency in the target language. Specifically, the study examined the type(s) of communication strategies male and female Turkish EFL students used when they interacted with the male and female native speakers of English, and whether there were any similarities and/or differences between male and female Turkish EFL students in the use of CSs regardless of the gender of the NS interlocutor.

The findings revealed that the gender of the NS interlocutor in both same- and opposite-sex dyads had an important impact on the use of CSs. All Turkish EFL students used more CSs with female rather than male native speakers of English because the former were more cooperative and more encouraging in conversations than the latter. Such findings agree with the findings of the gender studies on native speakers (e.g., Edelsky, 1981; Fishman, 1983) as well as nonnative speakers (Gass and Varonis, 1986; Pica et al., 1991; Wang, 1993). Also, the study revealed that success in communication depends on pairing, and particularly in native-nonnative interaction on the cooperation of the native speakers and the native speaker's responses. That is, mutual cooperation and NS feedback led to successful communication in the NS-NNS interaction. Cameron and Epling's (1989) study support the finding of this study. In addition to these findings, the personality of the students played an important role in these interactions (Tarone, 1977). That is, extrovert and talkative learners seemed to be more successful in the conversations than introvert and shy learners.

However, further studies are needed to find out the use of CSs in context such as in situations where power relations are unbalanced (e.g., interviews). As Young and Milanovic (1992) pointed out,

"different conversational genres such as ritual interactions, interviews, casual conversations, and serious negotiations may produce different structures of discourse" (p. 407). So, communication strategies would be different in interview situations than in noninterview situations, and in dyadic and in group interactions in which an unbalanced relationship between the interlocutors exists. That is, in such situations, the status of the interlocutors is not equal, and the interviewer has more control over the situation than the interactant who is being interviewed.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of the study have several important implications for second/foreign language teaching and learning. In the present study, female NS interlocutors were perceived as more supportive and encouraging than the nonnative speakers, and tried to initiate conversations and to talk more in the interactions. In addition, the teacher should design activities to develop their students' fluency and vocabulary in the classroom and also assign tasks which will make the language learners devote time to using English outside the classroom, having pen-pals, interviewing a foreigner, looking for specific information on news channels (e.g., CNN or BBC).

Pairing of the language learners who exhibit different interactive styles due to their proficiency in the language classroom should be done with care. The data from this study suggests that when teachers involve learners in group or pair activities, perhaps language learners with limited TL proficiency can be paired with the ones who are at a higher level of proficiency so that the latter will provide more comprehensible input to the former. As this study shows, the conversational dominance by one of the pair members does not necessarily lead to failure in communication, on the contrary, it can facilitate interaction.

The present study shows that language learners can feel uneasy and intimidated when interacting with teachers who are fully competent in the target language. To make such learners comfortable and relaxed, teachers might begin their language activities by asking personal questions. Also, as the study revealed, personality can be an important factor one which a language teacher should take into consideration. Perhaps, a language teacher should handle those language learners who are introvert and shy with special care.

Also, the total number of CSs employed by subjects shows the importance of CSs in situations where language learners face communication difficulties and/or communication breakdowns due to their limited proficiency in the target language. Therefore, the researcher believes language classes should focus on strategy training to develop

learners' coping skills with language problems. Disagreeing with some researchers (e.g., Bialystok and Kellerman, 1987; Bongaerts and Poulisse, 1989; Canale and Swain, 1980; Tarone, 1981) who have questioned the validity of strategy training, the researcher takes the side of researchers (e.g., Bialystok, 1990; Chen, 1990; Faerch and Kasper, 1983a; Haastrup and Phillipson, 1983; O'Malley, 1987; Paribakht, 1985) who supported strategy training like Tarone and Yule (1989):

> In our suggestions for teaching sociolinguistic skills, we argued for an essentially inductive, integrative approach. However, for the purpose of developing CSs, we feel that a more focused and even explicitly didactic approach is possible. (p. 114)

However, in line with Corder (1978) and Littlewood (1984), the researcher is also aware that some CSs, like interlanguage strategies (e.g., generalization, paraphrase or restructuring) and cooperative strategies can be taught while some strategies (e.g., transfer and word coinage) should be handled with care because teaching the latter may cause fossilization and hinder further learning in the TL. In other words, we can teach L2 -based strategies and avoid L1-based ones such as codeswitching. However, the teacher can make the students aware of these strategies so that they can use them when they face problems in communication.

In the researcher's opinion, language teachers can create meaningful and natural communicative activities utilizing authentic materials through activities which will lead learners to use CSs. Therefore, classroom activies should be designed either to promote the overall skill of the learners in successfully performing communicative acts, or to promote the learners' ability to use CSs when problems are encountered. These activites can provide valuable insights to language learners about how to cope with communicative problems. In addition, activities, which will also elicit the use of nonverbal behaviour (e.g., mime and gesture) should be designed. Below are some suggestions to the language teacher to take into consideration while creating communication strategy activities (Dornyei and Thurrell, 1991):

(i) Raising learners awareness about the potential uses and features of some CSs: Teachers can make the learners conscious of some strategies (e.g., paraphrase, cooperative or restructuring), and make them realize that these strategies could actually be useful when they face any difficulties while conversing.

(ii) Encouraging learners to take risks and to use CSs: Teachers can make the learners understand that they can easily manipulate the language without being afraid of making errors.

(iii) Providing authentic samples of native speakers' use of CSs: By using listening materials and video, and also through demonstration, teachers can show the communication strategies used by native speakers of the target language.

(iv) Providing opportunities to practice the use of CSs in the classroom: Teachers can supply communicative tasks (e.g., conversation, information gap, giving information) to learners in the classroom.

All in all, this study aimed at contributing to second language acquisition research in general, and communication strategy studies in particular.

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